

Lincoln Parish English Teachers Lead District-Wide Transformation



Using LTF, teachers with administrator support garner results

AT A GLANCE



Ruston High School

- Ruston, Louisiana
- The largest of the four high schools in Lincoln Parish Schools
- 1,115 total students*
- 45.7% eligible for Federal Free/Reduced Meal Program*
- 50.6% minority*

LTF and Ruston H.S.

- LTF partner since 2009
- English department began training in 2009
- Science and math departments began training in 2011
- 102 teachers trained in Lincoln Parish—40 English teachers (9 from Ruston High School and 9 from Ruston Junior High School)

“Rigorous curriculum isn’t busy work. It’s the things that make you think for yourself.”

Kari Hackbarth, Ruston H.S. Junior in Mrs. Stephenson’s AP English Language and Composition class

RUSTON HIGH SCHOOL CHALLENGE

Like many high schools across the nation, Ruston High School in northern Louisiana faced a growing challenge to its Advanced Placement (AP) program. Ruston’s increasingly diverse student population needed a rigorous college-preparatory program, and administrators and teachers wanted to encourage more students to enroll in AP classes—students who may not have been exposed to the rigor of advanced courses before.

Ruston High School’s teachers knew that students needed to acquire advanced academic skills before entering their first AP classes, but how best to prepare these students for the challenges of AP coursework remained a vexing question. Facing students who struggled with close reading and composition skills, English teacher Julie Stephenson proposed to her colleagues that developing a strong Vertical Team that shared a common vision could help address this skills gap.

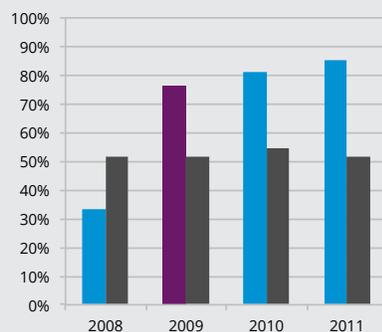
In 2008, Stephenson came to Ruston High School to teach AP English for the first time. “I started teaching AP Language and Composition to juniors who had not had any Pre-AP skill-building experiences, and I needed help breaking down the complex readings and composition skills necessary for success on the AP test,” she said.

Julie Stephenson learned of Laying the Foundation (LTF) through her mother, an LTF-trained AP teacher in Houston ISD, and at her mother’s suggestion, began incorporating LTF lessons into her classroom. However, Stephenson recognized there was value in attending the teacher-to-teacher training that could not be gained from just reading the few lessons her mother had provided. The gains Stephenson saw with her first group of students on the 2009 AP English exam convinced her the program would be a good fit for the Lincoln Parish district.

RUSTON HIGH SCHOOL SOLUTION

With the support of Mike Milstead, Ruston High School’s principal, Julie Stephenson and seven colleagues from English departments across the district attended an LTF Year One Summer Institute in 2009. Teachers were enthusiastic about the vertically aligned materials, teaching strategies, and assessments provided by LTF, and soon the majority of Ruston High School’s English staff were trained in the program.

Percent of Students Earning Qualifying Scores on AP English Exams



The percent of Ruston students with qualifying scores on the AP English Language and Composition and AP English Literature and Composition Exams outpaced the state percentages beginning the year teachers began using LTF materials.

Ruston School Performance Score (SPS)



Louisiana awards high schools a SPS based on their test scores and graduation index. Ruston had steady growth in their SPS, but when teachers began attending LTF Training, the growth increased at a much faster rate. Ruston is now 0.3 points away from meeting the state goal of 120 three years early.

■ Ruston H.S. ■ State ■ Began Using LTF Materials - - - Began LTF Training



In order for students to be successful with college-level material, Ruston teachers knew expectations had to be raised earlier in students' academic careers. Following their first LTF Training, the Ruston High School English team met to develop a plan. Stephenson recalled, "We all came together with the philosophy that this is doable, we're going to change, and we're going to do it together."

Using the LTF English Skill Progression Charts as a guide, teachers began conversing about teaching strategies and making curricular connections between grade levels. Their principal even picked up on the teachers' enthusiasm outside of formal curriculum meetings. "It's astounding to hear teachers talking about methods in the hallway between classes. Four years ago we weren't having those conversations," commented Principal Milstead.

Through these vertical planning sessions, teachers began realizing the same strategies they were using in their advanced courses would benefit all their students. "We started transferring a lot of what we were doing in Pre-AP to our regular classes," said Stephenson. As teachers used LTF methods, they were pleased to see the improvement in their students' performance and engagement.

The shift in the campus culture to a philosophy that all children could take on rigorous material, even in on-level courses, allowed the campus to see tremendous results. English teacher Emily Howell attributes this shift to teachers' greater expectations for all their students. In addition, she now consciously tailors her instruction to meet the needs of individual students in her classroom. Julie Stephenson agrees and noted, "Our kids are better prepared for state readiness exams, and they're better prepared for college."

RUSTON HIGH SCHOOL RESULTS

Ruston High School's English teachers first attended LTF Training in 2009 and began integrating strategies, lessons, and assessments. In the short time since then, school-wide results in terms of teacher practices and student performance are already noticeable.

Since implementing LTF:

- The percent of students earning qualifying scores on AP English exams increased from 33.3 percent in 2008 to 85.1 percent in 2011.
- The Ruston High School graduation rate increased from 73.1 percent in 2008 to nearly 93 percent in 2011.
- Ruston High School experienced an unprecedented rate of increase in its School Performance Score (SPS) from 2010 to 2011, which teachers and administrators attribute to LTF. In terms of their SPS, Ruston High School is now in the top 7.6 percent of Louisiana schools.

Principal Milstead attributes much of the students' success to LTF because the program affects the mechanics of how teachers teach. Milstead added, "The skills the students take away from this means whenever they go to standardized testing they are hitting home runs."

Milstead also credits LTF, in combination with other campus initiatives, with empowering teachers to move struggling students forward in

incremental ways. Because of a shift in teacher mindset and approach to instruction, students are engaged and more likely to persist to graduation.

LTF believes teachers who are committed to advancing student performance can drive district change when they have access to high-quality training and resources. Ruston English teachers Julie Stephenson and Emily Howell, the 2011 and 2012 Louisiana Department of Education High School Teachers of the Year respectively, represent the kind of teaching force LTF aims to empower nationwide.

LTF recruits highly qualified teachers such as Stephenson to become national LTF Trainers in order to develop a cadre of mentors within the district and ensure sustainable implementation.

This recruitment process fulfills LTF's mission to give workshop participants the value of a master teacher's experience and gives the district the advantage of a teacher mentor for its staff. "When I started teaching AP classes at Ruston, I had no mentor and needed help. With LTF I'm able to provide that mentorship for others so our students can be successful," said Stephenson.

The results seen at the school level with only a portion of the teachers trained in LTF methods leads Principal Milstead to believe the gains will multiply as more teachers in more subjects are trained. In addition to English teachers, math and science teachers at Ruston High School and throughout the district are now receiving LTF Training and resources.

WHAT IS LTF?

When Ruston High School teachers began the three-year LTF Training program, they gained access to:

- teacher-to-teacher training that offers authentic solutions to classroom challenges
- classroom-ready lessons linked to the Common Core State Standards
- content knowledge, pedagogy, and resources necessary to integrate rigorous coursework into their classes
- instruction on how to teach higher-order thinking skills
- hands-on experience with model lessons
- guidance in creating original lessons connected to district curriculum
- online LTF Forums allowing for collaboration with LTF staff and teachers across the country

The LTF program provides math, science, and English teachers in grades six through twelve with the content knowledge, teaching strategies, vertically aligned materials, and assessments required to emulate AP-level coursework in the lower grades. LTF materials can be integrated into any curriculum to raise instructional rigor.

Ruston High School represents what LTF envisions for all schools: empowered teachers, successful students, and lasting results.

For more information on Laying the Foundation's programs, visit www.ltftraining.org.